8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RHl Caucasia RHl

585 [776] (7) In a number of instances we have noticed that the dagger or sword was used in connection with the marriage ceremony. The best-man took the bride around the hearth and each time he struck the chain with his dagger. The bride had to enter her new home under an arch of swords or with a dagger or club held above her head. This wedding custom, too, has a religious basis. The household gods of the bride's family have become exceedingly jealous of the bride, because by marrying she has united herself to another family and will now worship other ancestors, abandoning her own. These jealous godlets realize that the best time to enter her new home and to cause countless harm is simultaneously with the bride. Fortunately, these household gods are afraid of daggers.[114] [844] Among the Georgian mountaineers, a mother after having given birth to a child will keep a sword under the pillow as a protection against aerial spirits.[115] Spirits are afraid of the sword for several reasons—at least such is our conjecture. The God of Iron, of the Sword, and of the Hearth-Chain is one and the same god, called Safa. This sword ceremony may perhaps insure [823] Safa's protection against jealous godlets. It may also insure the protection of [769] the departed because *iron* is a means of contacting ancestors. In Ossetia on the [787] "feast of the dedication of clothing" clothes are consecrated and sent to the netherworld by means of an iron knife.[116] The Ingushi get in contact with their departed by means of iron tongs.[117]

(8) The other marriage ceremonies are likewise mainly pastoral in character: horse-racing, submission to the husband, wishes for a rich progeny but always with a disproportion of "nine boys to every blue-eyed girl." Finally, the long elaborate and expensive wedding itself is typical of pastoral peoples.

[606] There are, however, a few traces of a so-called mother-right culture. The rôle played by the mother-in-law in the ceremonies, as we have stressed (*supra*, p. 125), is indeed not inconsistent with the position of the mother of the household in a patriarchal family, but, we must admit that their astounding importance gives them a suspiciously matriarchal colouring: in the ceremonies described, it is the Lesghian mother who welcomes the bride into the house as if she were the head of the family. It is the mother who holds her by the hand as she crosses the threshold. It is the mother's brother who led the bride's horse in the Ingiloi procession from her home to that of her groom. It is the mother who puts the honey into the mouth of the bride as a sign that the bride has a sweet life ahead of her under such an amiable mistress as her mother-in-law. And we should not forget that in the Lesghian engagement it was the mother who presented the engagement gifts which concluded the betrothal contract.[118]

595 585 114 We cannot conclude this chapter without briefly refuting some of Kovalevskij's assumptions. Like so many anthropologists of his day, he was inclined to find traces of an epoch older than that of patriarchy, and older than that of

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[114] For the custom among the Ossetes see Kovalevskij, *Coutume contemp.*, pp. 170 f.

[115] Cf. Reineggs, *op. cit.*, II, p. 112 f.

[116] Kokiev, *Slepovye soerukeinija*, (Vladikavkaz, 1928), p. 38.

[117] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, II, p. 120.

[118] *Supra*, p. 103.

8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RHl Caucasia RHl

847 married life (in Pshavia, not before the third year[36]). The second child may not see the light of day till the seventh year after marriage, and the third child (just as in Pshavia[37]) must be the last.[38] We called the practice "thoroughly un-Georgian" because it is resorted to only when the mountaineers consider it unavoidable. The indescribable poverty of their land "drove" them to this painful extinction of baby girls. It was this same poverty that led the neighbouring South Ossetes (the Tualti, inhabitants of Nar, Tib, Mamisson and other *auls*) in the eighteenth century to expose or strangle their infant girls and to sell their boys into slavery in spite of their great longing for male children.[39] In Ossetia, [732] before the Revolution, physically deformed babes would be choked to death immediately after birth, without even being shown to the mother. Such deformed infants were killed regardless of sex, for the Ossetes believed that such infants owe their existence to evil spirits. Similarly, even today, deformed colts, calves and lambs are killed immediately after birth, because "they come from the evil spirits."[40] We have already mentioned that some Georgian mountaineers kill their baby girls in the belief that the next child will infallibly be a boy.[41]

§ 5. OTHER BIRTH CUSTOMS

1. The Couvade

846 The couvade, to my knowledge,[42] is not practiced anywhere in North Caucasia. We do find it among the SOUTHERN CAUCASIANS, where not a few traces of an ancient mother-right culture have survived. The couvade is upposed to be practiced by the Yassai of Sakataly primeval forest, southwest of Daghestan,[43] and according to Strabo by the West Iberians.[44]

2. Circumcision

304 This custom, wherever it is found in the Caucasus, is doubtless of Islamic origin.[45] The Mohammedan Ossetes were greatly averse to the practice till the mullahs succeeded in convincing them that all uncircumcised persons would have to spend their eternity without a head.[46]

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[36] Makalatija, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

[37] *ibid.*

[38] Hahn. *Bilder aus dem Kaukasus*, pp. 73 f.

[39] Kovalevskij, *Coutume contemp.*, p. 189.

[40] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[41] *Sagva*, p. 140.

[42] Unfortunately L. M. Melikset-Bekov's study on the couvade in the Caucasus (*K voprosu ob obqine kuvady na Kavkaze v svjazi s jazykovymi perežitkami matriarchatu*) is not at my disposal.

[43] Essad-Bey, *Der Kaukasus, Seine Berge, Völker und Geschichte*, p. 103.

[44] Strabo, iii.4, 17. Cf. N. Marr, *Der japhetische Kaukasus und das dritte ethnische Element im Bildungsprozess der mittelländischen Kultur*, p. 72; A. Baschmakoff, *Cinquante siècles d'évolution ethnique, etc.*, p. 85.

[45] For example, in Daghestan (cf. Reineggs, *op. cit.*, I, p. 191).

[46] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 97.